

## THE ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM'S POLICY FOR COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT

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## THE ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM'S POLICY FOR COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT

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**Name of museum: Royal Air Force Museum**

**Name of governing body: Trustees of the Royal Air Force Museum**

**Date on which this policy was approved by Board of Trustees: December 2021**

### **Policy review procedure:**

The collections development policy will be published and reviewed at least once every three years. The RAF Museum Collections Development Policy is approved by the Board of Trustees. This policy **supersedes** and **cancels** all earlier and existing policies, practices and customs.

### **Date at which this policy is due for review:**

December 2024

**Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the Collections Development Policy and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.**

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## **1. Relationship to other relevant Museum policies/plans**

1.1 In March 2019, the Trustees of the Royal Air Force Museum signed off a new Strategic Plan to 2030 for the Museum.

### **Our vision for the next ten years**

Inspiring **everyone** with the RAF story - the people who shape it and its place in our lives

### **Our purpose**

To share the story of the Royal Air Force, past, present and future – using the stories of its people and our collections in order to engage, inspire and encourage learning.

At the Royal Air Force Museum, our work and our behaviour are underpinned by six guiding values:

**INtegrity:** we are open, transparent and ethical

**Sharing:** we work as a team to ensure our collections and expertise are accessible to all

**Passion:** we care deeply about sharing our collections and their stories

**Innovation:** we tell our stories and develop our business with creativity and imagination

**Relevance:** we ensure our legacy by linking our histories with today and tomorrow

**Excellence:** we are professional and strive for excellence in all we do

We will achieve our vision and purpose through five strategic priorities that focus outwards with our collections at our heart.

- Inspiring innovative engagement, debate and reflection
- Inspiring our people within a dynamic, diverse and collaborative culture

- Embedding an entrepreneurial, agile and sustainable approach
- Leading the way with brilliant basics
- Connecting with communities and partners.

1.2 As part of the Museum's suite of strategies and policies, the Senior Leadership Team signed off an updated Collections Development Strategy (CDS) in 2020, running to 2025. This Policy supports the delivery of that strategy.

1.3 The CDS includes details of the Museum's Collection Review which began in 2014. The Review is designed to focus the collections to be relevant to our Purpose, to share the story of the RAF, either through the acquisition of new material or through transfer or disposal.

1.4 The Board of Trustees will ensure that both acquisitions, transfers and disposals are carried out openly and with transparency.

1.5 By definition, the Museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its stated objectives. The Board of Trustees, therefore, embraces the principle that sound curatorial reasons must be established before consideration is given to any acquisition to the collection, or the transfer or disposal of any objects from the Museum's collection.

1.6 Acquisitions outside the stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

1.7 The Museum recognises its responsibility, when acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Museum Accreditation Standard. This includes using SPECTRUM primary procedures for collections management. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

1.8 The Museum will undertake due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the Board of Trustees or responsible officer is satisfied that the Museum can acquire a valid title to the object in question.

1.9 The Museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

1.10 The Museum only insures objects on inward loan, at present through commercial insurance.

## **2. History of the collections**

The Museum was formally established under a Deed of Trust in 1965 and opened to the public on 15 November 1972. Little control was exercised over the quantity or quality of material accepted into the collections between 1965 and 1986. This was due to:

- Enthusiasm to build the Museum's collection from scratch

- A huge public response to the creation of the Museum leading to vastly more material being offered than the staff had capacity to appraise
- Acceptance of material in preference to risking giving offence
- Accepting poor examples as insurance against better ones never being offered.

This resulted in several undesirable effects, primarily:

- Continued acceptance of duplicated material
- Accrual of surplus objects because the Museum lacked a policy or procedure enabling their disposal
- A growing body of objects in need of identification and assessment.

A more restrained collecting policy began to operate in 1986, although its parameters were not formally recorded. In 1994 a formal, general collection and disposal policy was compiled, but it was not actively applied until 1997 with the introduction of the Museum's formal Collecting Statement.

The Museum's Inventory Project to record every object within our collections began in 1998 and informed collecting decisions as it went along. This can be viewed as the beginning of conscious and conscientious collecting at the Museum.

### 3. An overview of current collections in August 2021

Collection Department	Objects - includes Permanent (accessioned), Inward Loans and Support (interpretive, surrogate, handling) collections
Aircraft and Exhibits	55,000
Archives	665,000
Film and Sound	16,000
Fine Art	7,000
Library	206,000
Photographs	151,353
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,305,000</b>

#### 3.1 Definitions

The Museum distinguishes between different statuses of object. These are as follows:

##### **Permanent**

3.1.1 The **Permanent Collection** consists of accessioned objects owned and preserved by the Museum in perpetuity for long-term public access, engagement and research.

3.1.2 **Accessioned** objects are those that have been formally acquired and accepted into the Permanent Collection. They are documented in accordance with SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on the Museum's Collections Management System (CMS).

##### **Inward Loans**

3.1.3 **Inward loans** are managed by the Collections Information team and recorded on Collections Management forms and the CMS for administrative purposes. Due to their status, they require the same level of management and care as accessioned objects.

### **Support**

3.1.4 The Support Collection consists of objects held to support public access, engagement and research through additional interpretation and wider context. These collections are not managed by the same processes as those in 3.1.2 and 3.1.3. They include:

3.1.5 **Interpretive** objects are managed by the Collections team in conjunction with the Head of Exhibitions & Interpretation and are currently recorded on the CMS for administrative purposes. They are contextual objects of low RAF relevance or duplicate RAF objects that are used to interpret the RAF story within a wider context (e.g., Air Raid Precautions objects in a Battle of Britain showcase) or through more open physical access (e.g. touch objects on open display).

3.1.6 **Surrogate** objects are managed by the Collections team. Some are recorded on the CMS while others are recorded in departmental files. Surrogates are analogue or digital copies of or substitutes for objects already held in the Museum's Permanent Collection or temporarily deposited for the purpose of copying.

3.1.7 **Handling** objects are managed by the Access and Learning (A&L) teams using departmental forms to document acquisition and a spreadsheet to catalogue and account for the objects. They consist of surrogate (replica), or duplicate original objects used in A&L handling sessions and are sometimes worn by members of the public (e.g. uniforms and flying clothing). While every effort is made to maintain and preserve the material, it is expected that these objects may degrade over time and eventually, in some instances, become irreparable and disposed of.

### **Deposits**

3.1.8 The Museum holds many objects which it does not hold title to, and which do not fall under the above statuses:

3.1.9 **Long-term** deposited objects (also known as un-accessioned objects) represent two thirds of the accumulated objects held by the Museum. The majority are aircraft technical drawings and library objects. They include objects deposited in the long-term care of the Museum which have yet to be assigned a status, catalogued or passed through the Collections Review process. In the past many objects were deposited with little or no corresponding entry documentation or formal acknowledgement of receipt. The bulk of these objects have now been inventoried and allocated temporary T-numbers, often at group or batch level. Due to their uncertain status, provenance and documentation they require the same level of management and care as accessioned objects.

3.1.10 **Short-term** deposited objects are, when newly arrived on premises, recorded through entry forms (as potential new acquisitions). Due to their uncertain status, they require the same level of management and care as accessioned objects.

## **3.2 Overview of Permanent Collection**

3.2.1 The Museum operates from two public sites, Colindale in North West London and Cosford in the West Midlands. The Museum also has collection stores on MOD premises at Stafford and Cosford.

3.2.2 The Permanent Collection includes aircraft, personal equipment, uniforms, medals, film, photographs, fine art, publications and archive documents. In order to explain the full history of the service, these date from before the formation of the Royal Flying Corps in 1912 to the present day.

3.2.3 The Museum's Permanent Collection is acquired, stored and documented by specialist curators at the three sites detailed in 3.2.1 above. The following is an outline of the Permanent Collection material:

#### **Aircraft and Exhibits**

3.2.4 The A&E collection is dominated by aircraft-related material, such as airframe components and internal equipment (over 40,000 objects, including 233 complete airframes) and clothing (over 20,000 objects). Other notable sections include commemorative objects (3,500), medals (3,000) and survival equipment (3,000).

3.2.5 The majority of the collection relates to the RAF's first 50 years. Since 1965 material was largely collected on a type basis with proactive collecting limited to a relatively small number of specific purchases for exhibition. Objects relating to specific people and people stories are, therefore, limited and generally relate to senior RAF officers.

3.2.6 Since 2016 the Museum has actively adopted a contemporary collecting focus to support the development of new exhibitions and as part of its Strategic Plan 2030 to reflect the diverse and whole history of the Royal Air Force. Acquiring further contemporary material will continue as one of the collecting priorities. Individual contemporary collecting projects may be proposed and undertaken by curatorial staff with defined outcomes, subject to approval by the Collections Development Committee.

#### **Archives**

3.2.7 The Museum is an approved Place of Deposit. Papers forming the Archive collection have been gathered from 1965 onwards with active collecting taking place since 1970. It incorporates drawings and technical papers (300,000), personal papers (200,000) and administrative records for the RAF Museum.

3.2.8 The strength of the current collection lies with the material relating to the First and Second World War. The Inter-War period is reasonably represented but coverage of the Cold War era and recent decades is weak. A major strength of the collection overall is the personal papers of those who have served. This material includes objects relating to men and women of all ranks serving in numerous theatres.

3.2.9 The material relating to the aerospace industry is one of the largest outside of the industry itself. The Archive also includes material which complements and supports objects held within the other Museum collections.

#### **Film and Sound**

3.2.10 The collection includes official RAF and Air Ministry training films, documentaries, amateur material shot by RAF personnel, films documenting trials of aircraft, weapons and other equipment and unedited footage from a variety of producers, including the RAF and MOD film units.

3.2.11 The collection also includes a growing number of oral history recordings, documenting the memories and experiences of RAF personnel from the First World War to recent operations in Libya and Afghanistan. Areas already covered in this way include Cold War air defence, with emphasis on operations by Lightning and Phantom aircraft as well as transport flights by the RAF Lockheed Hercules fleet.

3.2.12 Particular strengths of the collection include Second World War training and documentary films, footage produced by manufacturers during the 1940s and 1950s and material relating to the Cold War in Europe.

### **Fine Art**

3.2.13 The art collection consists mainly of paintings (600), drawings and watercolours (3,900), prints and posters (2,400) and a smaller number of sculpture (90) and ceramic (four) works. It incorporates the War Artists Collection, comprising Second World War works from the official commissioning scheme of the War Artists Advisory Committee (WAAC), and the Air Ministry's scheme (in total 400 works).

3.2.14 The collection reflects many aspects of the service, its people, operational methodologies, noteworthy events, artists' and institutional perspectives, and many other facets which cannot easily be put across by using other forms of museum object. It also provides a view of the RAF in colour, which photography cannot match in any quantity until the mid-1950s.

3.2.15 Since the mid-1990s a policy of acquiring works which were painted at or close to the time during which particular events and RAF activities occurred has been pursued in favour of broadly commemorative works. Exceptions may be made for contemporary works which conceptually reflect back on the history of the RAF, raising questions of continuity and change.

### **Library**

3.2.16 The collection consists of RAF publications used for operational, training, public relations or recreational purposes, commercial publications about RAF history, units, stations, equipment and personnel. These include large collections of books and periodicals (over 76,000), technical publications (70,000), maps and charts (13,000).

3.2.17 The collection is a valuable source for supporting the Museum's internal research activities, answering public enquiries and aids research into the history of the RAF.

### **Photographs**

3.2.18 The collection primarily comprises photographs covering the first 50 years of the RAF's existence. Most of the collection is made up of small collections from individuals, usually former service personnel or their families. There are a number of large collections, however, including Charles E Brown (photographer), British Aerospace, Kingston (aircraft manufacturer) and Jack Bruce (aviation historian).

3.2.19 The collection is used to provide images for Museum exhibitions and commercial publications, in addition to aiding internal research and answering public enquiries.

3.2.20 The Museum obtains images from many sources, including aerospace companies and other service providers working with the Royal Air Force. In certain circumstances material unsuitable for the Permanent Collection may be acquired for the Interpretative Collection, supporting exhibitions and other forms of interpretation.

#### **4. Themes and priorities for future collecting**

4.1 The proactive development of collections is paramount to ensure that the Museum reflects the complexity of the Royal Air Force, its place in British society, the impact it has had on British and global history, and its ongoing relevance. It will ensure that Museum collects and preserves tangible and intangible material that can be by its nature more ephemeral and may otherwise be lost. In all instances, items offered to the Collection (whether by donation, sale or bequest) will be assessed for their potential display, research and educational value.

4.2 The Museum's current strengths lie in the period of 1939-1945, with some 80% of holdings relating to this period. The priorities for proactive collecting will focus on the following areas, which have been identified as significant gaps in the Permanent Collection:

- a) Personal – material, including diaries, letters and mementoes relating to service life in the RAF
- b) Cultural – material relating to the Royal Air Force's ethos, values, spirit and character
- c) Diverse – objects of social, cultural and material diversity, relating to a wider range of military purposes and personal roles
- d) Contemporary – material relating to current and recent RAF personnel and activities, with a specific focus on meeting exhibit, graphic and audio-visual content priorities
- e) Born-Digital – material that originates in digital form. Born-digital material relating to the RAF story, with a specific focus on meeting content priorities for the 'Future' chapter of the Museum's Interpretation Strategy
- f) Local – material relating to service life and activities at RAF Cosford and RAF Hendon.

4.3 Future collecting identified for specific areas of the Collection include:

##### **Aircraft & Exhibits:**

The Museum's ability to collect and conserve aircraft and other large airframes is governed by its current spaces for storage and display. However, priorities include Bravo November (Chinook), the BAE Hawk T1 and a Puma Mk1/2. Further potential acquisitions will be evaluated as opportunities present themselves.

Aircraft Systems and Weapon Systems, such as radio, radar, flight controls or even fuel systems would enhance the Museum's holdings. In terms of uniform, the Museum will continue to acquire standard No.1 & No.2 dress uniform items and do more to acquire more examples of items that reflect diversity within the service, both by role, ethnicity, or gender. Aircrew Equipment Assemblies and contemporary flying gear, and examples of FR 95 flying kit in desert or temperate DPM are current gaps that should be filled. Operational clothing and that of cadet organisations will also be



collected. Wherever possible these should be examples with provenance and service history.

Medals, badges and other insignia will continue to be collected, particularly issued campaign medals for recent and current operations, including the Operational Service Medals. Material relating to otherwise-neglected theatres and operations, such as the Far East in the Second World War, or the post 1945 period, will similarly be collected.

In terms of wider Collection, the Museum currently lacks material that helps tell the wider social history of the RAF. Important aspects like training, accommodation, food, hobbies and the wider fabric of service life, which can be represented by different types of objects, will be sought out. The experience of military families will also be better recorded through wider collecting. Similarly, objects that reflect or represent issues such as mental health amongst veterans will also be acquired.

Material that will enable the Museum to improve its documentation and representation of diverse stories within the RAF will be actively sought out, as will material from the post-1945 RAF, both of which will redress current imbalances.

#### Archives:

The Museum will continue to develop the Archives collection with material that complements or completes existing collections. This will enable the Museum to consolidate its position as the leading repository for papers relating to the Royal Air Force especially the post-1945 RAF. The Museum will prioritise original items to support research opportunities for current and future audiences and particularly where there is a likelihood that they can be displayed in appropriate conditions. It will also prioritise acquiring entire mixed media collections which provide a fuller insight into an individual's story. The Museum may accept Public Records as a Place of Deposit. Offers of official RAF records will be considered subject to guidance from the Ministry of Defence (MOD) records review team and RAF Air Historical Branch. Acquisition of public records will be made, subject to the direction of The National Archives (TNA). The Museum will continue to collect archival material in physical and born digital formats and in accordance with the principles and priorities set out in this policy. The Museum will consider the display potential of low-resolution images and will endeavour to obtain high-resolution images where possible. If digital preservation requirements dictate migration to a new format, the Museum will do so, unless this is prohibited by the terms of acquisition. The challenges associated with digital collections should not preclude the Museum from collecting them since the Museum's internal policies are rigorous enough to accommodate them.

#### Film & Sound:

As with other areas of the Collection, the Museum will continue to develop its existing holdings. The Film and Sound collection offers the Museum the opportunity to be agile and contemporary, following recent developments and deployments as they occur. However, they can also be developed through targeted collecting for Museum projects, such as further work on the Hidden Heroes programme, and in broadening the Museum's holdings in terms of growing collections relating to female personnel and service personnel with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Another project that will be prioritised will be the collecting of interviews with aircrew that served on bomber aircraft in counter-insurgency campaigns of the 1950s and 60s, and the early V Bomber force.

#### Fine Art:

The Museum's strength in this area is the Second World War. For the First World War period, more abstract, Futurist or Vorticist works that reflect the novelty and dynamism of flight would strengthen the collection's coverage of modern perspectives on the machine age. In the Interwar period, the expansion of the RAF and military aviation around the world was crucial to the popular imagination of flight. As such, works connected to this period and theme will be acquired. Post 1945, there is a gap in coverage of jet age, space age and Cold War themes, while RAF Space Command is an emerging development to reflect on. Art generated by serving RAF personnel, either while deployed or retrospectively, will also be considered.

#### Library:

The Museum's Library will continue to grow with the acquisition of relevant analogue and digital reference material.

#### Photographs:

The Museum will continue to acquire large-scale collections of photographs from aviation photographers of any period. As with other areas of the Collection, this is an area where the post-1945 history of the RAF can be developed further. Increasingly, photographs entering the Museum are born-digital, and this will continue.

#### 4.4 The Museum will avoid collecting:

- a) Duplicates – duplicates of material already held unless they (a) are for a defined, justified and approved purpose, such as research, interpretive, handling, or surrogate use or (b) have greater provenance and associated collections that tell a wider or different story
- b) Copies – paper-based material that is exclusively a copy of what is already made publicly accessible by other bodies, or copies of original material that is held elsewhere in private or public hands. Some collections of original papers may hold a limited amount of copied material. The relevance of this to the wider collection will be discussed when acquisitions are proposed. Some copying for the purpose of exhibitions or interpretation, or to enhance Museum documentation will occur – but these copies will not be accessioned.
- c) Hazardous material – notably objects containing asbestos, radium (in many instrument dials), compressed gas, cellulose nitrate film (unless for the purpose of immediately copying to a safe format for long-term preservation), Polychlorinated Biphenols (PCBs) or controlled drugs. Where asbestos, radium, PCBs or gas canisters form part of an aircraft or other large object a risk assessment will be undertaken, and a decision made on the Museum's ability to manage the acquisition and mitigate the risk
- d) Objects in poor condition – material in a poor state of preservation, unless notably significant or unique
- e) Resource-dependent objects – material likely to adversely impact on the management of existing collections. For example, objects or collections of poorly preserved, duplicate or like-material for which the Museum does not have sufficient resource or capacity to manage long-term care, storage, development, digitisation, exhibition and other public access.

4.5 Work is undertaken to communicate the message that we want to collect material relating to all current service personnel and veterans including their still and moving

images, and any diaries, memoirs, letters, emails and personal objects relevant to their RAF story as soon as they are ready to share them.

4.6 Targeted collecting will continue to be part of the Museum's on-going work, and future collecting areas will be decided by the Head of Collections and Research in consultation with Curators under the approved Collections Development Strategy and this Policy.

## **5. Acquisition**

5.1 Acquisition decisions will be authorised in writing by the Museum's Collections Development Committee.

5.2 The procedure for agreeing acquisitions is:

Proposals recommending any and every acquisition are submitted to the Acquisitions and Transfers Group (ATG) for discussion and consideration.

Following the discussion and agreement of the ATG to proceed with a proposal, authorisation for the acquisition of an object, by whatever means, will be given as follows:

- a) For an object valued up to £24,999, authorisation will be via the Head of Collections and Research.
- b) For acquisitions of items with a value between £25,000 and £249,999, authorisation by the Director of Content and Programmes.
- c) For an object whose value lies between £250,000 and £499,999, by the Chief Executive.
- d) For an object or group of objects valued above £500,000 by the Chair of Trustees on behalf of the Board.
- e) Any novel or contentious object, regardless of value, will be referred to the Board of Trustees for their approval.

Any member of staff with approval status shall be a permanent appointment.

Purchases proposed that are not supportable within the Museum's approved annual revenue budget will be subject to prior approval by the Finance and Resources Committee. Approved acquisitions will be processed by the proposing curator with support from the Department of Collections Services and other RAFM staff as required.

5.3 The Museum will not acquire any object or specimen unless it is satisfied that the object or specimen has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country's laws. (For the purposes of this paragraph 'country of origin' includes the United Kingdom.)

5.4 In accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the UK ratified with effect from 1 November 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, the Museum will reject any objects that have been illicitly traded. The Board of Trustees will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.

5.5 In some cases where title cannot be obtained, for example anonymous donations or due to a lack of response from a written request to sign a Transfer of Title form, the Museum may still acquire the object, but it will be clearly noted on the catalogue record that title has not been secured. In addition, a record will be retained of all attempts made to contact depositors (e.g., correspondence, telephone calls).

## **6. Legal and ethical framework for acquisition, transfer and disposal of objects**

6.1 The Museum recognises its responsibility to work within the parameters of the Museums Association Code of Ethics and Disposals Toolkit when considering acquisition and disposal.

## **7. Collecting policies of other museums**

7.1 The Museum will take account of the collecting policies of other museums and other organisations collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. It will consult with these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialism, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

7.2 Specific reference is made to the following museums:

- Science Museum Group
- Imperial War Museums
- National Army Museum
- National Museum of the Royal Navy
- Museum of Army Flying
- The National Archives

## **8. Archival holdings (for details please refer to section 3.2)**

8.1 The Museum is approved by The National Archives as a Place of Deposit. As the Museum holds archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, it aims to meet the standard defining good practice through the Archive Service Accreditation scheme administered by The National Archives and has applied for Accredited Archive Service status.

## **9. Themes and priorities for rationalisation, transfer and disposal**

9.1 The principles on which priorities for rationalisation, transfer and disposal are determined will be through a formal review process that identifies which collections are included and excluded from the review. The outcome of review and any subsequent rationalisation will not reduce the quality or significance of the collection and will result in a more relevant, usable, well-managed collection.

9.2 The procedures used will meet professional sector and legal standards. The Museum will ensure the process is fully documented, open and transparent. There will be clear communication with key stakeholders about the outcomes and the process.

9.3 As part of its Strategic Plan the Museum is undertaking a review of the Collection. This process began in July 2014 with a review of the Aircraft collection. The guiding principles of the review are articulated in the Collections Review Policy (RAFM/DCM/2/6/29/1).

9.4 The Royal Air Force Museum Board of Trustees accepts the principle that, except for sound curatorial reasons, there is a strong presumption against the disposal and transfer of any objects in the Museum's permanent collection. However, rationalisation and disposal will be considered as a course of action in the following cases:

- a) to remove material that does not tell or support the telling of the RAF story
- b) to eliminate unnecessary duplication of objects in the Permanent Collection
- c) to re-classify objects to the most appropriate collection: Permanent or Support
- d) to remove from the Collection any object whose condition has become such that it is no longer a viable constituent of the Collection

## **10. Transfer or disposal of Collections**

10.1 Decisions regarding the transfer or disposal of collection items will be minuted by the Museum's Collections Development Committee.

10.2 All transfers or disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal.

10.3 The Museum will confirm that it is legally free to transfer or dispose of an object, and any agreements made with donors at the time of acquisition will be taken into account. The Museum may consider the transfer or disposal of material to which it cannot prove title only after thorough consultation and with the approval of the Collections Development Committee. Advice will be sought from the Museums Association or other sector bodies as appropriate.

10.4 When transfer or disposal of a Museum object is being considered, the Museum will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the object is transferred by sale. Where an object was acquired from an individual or an organisation, where possible the Museum will make every effort to contact the donor or their family to inform and discuss any decision to transfer or dispose of an object in advance of beginning the formal process.

10.5 When transfer or disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined below will be followed and the method may be by transfer through gift, sale, exchange or, as last resort, disposal by destruction.

10.6 The decision to transfer or dispose of material from the Collection will be taken by the Museum only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors including the public benefit, the implications for the Museum's collection and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. Expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the Museum will also be sought where appropriate. Where appropriate, the Collections Development Committee will first consider a loan to another organisation before deciding to recommend a transfer or disposal. Any expert advice received will be recorded in the minutes of the Collections Development Committee.

10.7 A recommendation to transfer an object, whether by gift, exchange or sale, or dispose of an object by destruction (in the case of an object too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections or for reasons of

health and safety), will be the responsibility of the Collections Development Committee acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff and not of the curator or manager of the collection acting alone.

10.8 Once a decision to transfer material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain. It will, therefore, first be offered by gift directly to other UK Accredited museums likely to be interested in its acquisition. This will normally be through direct contact with relevant museums, a notice on the MA's Find an Object web listing service, an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal, on the Museum's website and/or in specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).

10.9 The announcement relating to gifting will indicate the number and nature of objects involved, the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution and any gifting conditions. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other UK Accredited museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period the Museum will assess any expressions of interest, including its own requirements, such as internal transfer to the Support Collection. The RAF Museum will request the right of first refusal on the return of the gift should the new institution decide in future to transfer it onwards.

10.10 If no expressions of interest have been received from UK Accredited museums, the Museum may consider transferring the material to other interested individuals or organisations in the following order of precedence:

- a) Gift to an organisation within the UK public domain (e.g., university or college, heritage centre)
- b) Sale through open public auction or sealed bidding process
- c) Gift to a museum outside the UK
- d) Return to donor
- e) Recycling
- f) Destruction

10.11 In accordance with the Museums Association's Disposals Toolkit any money raised as a result of transfer through sale will be applied solely and directly for the benefit of the Museum's collection. Money raised will be invested in the long-term sustainability, use and development of the collection (for example, by creating or increasing an endowment, making new acquisitions or making a significant capital investment which will bring long-term benefit to the existing Museum).

10.12 Full records will be kept of all decisions on transfers and disposals and the objects involved and proper arrangements made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the objects concerned, including photographic records where practicable in accordance with SPECTRUM Procedure on de-accession and disposal.

10.13 Where objects recommended for transfer are subject to legal restrictions, such as those imposed by the Official Secrets Acts, Data Protection Acts, or privacy agreements, the Museum will only transfer the objects to an organisation authorised by the relevant legislation to hold such material, with preference being given to Accredited museums where possible. If no suitable organisation can be found, and it

is not possible to remove the restrictions (for example by requesting downgrading) then the material will be destroyed in accordance with the procedures detailed below.

10.14 In instances where the Museum transfers Permanent Collection material to the Support Collection, subject to satisfactory assessment and approval, it will ensure that this material is given adequate support to ensure its long-term utility, while recognising that handled and operated objects may, due to wear and tear, not be held in perpetuity.

### **Transfer by Exchange**

10.15 The nature of transfer by exchange means that the Museum will not necessarily be in a position to exchange the material with another Accredited museum. The Museum will, therefore, ensure that issues relating to accountability and impartiality are carefully considered to avoid undue influence on its decision-making process.

10.15.1 In cases where the Museum wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or non-Accredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 10.1-6 will apply.

10.15.2 If the exchange is proposed to be made with a specific Accredited museum, other Accredited museums which collect in the same or related areas will be directly notified of the proposal and their comments will be requested.

10.15.3 If the exchange is proposed with a non-Accredited museum, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the Museum will place a notice on the MA's Find an Object web listing service or make an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).

10.15.4 Both the notification and announcement will provide information on the number and nature of the specimens or objects involved both in the Museum's collection and those intended to be acquired in exchange. A period of at least two months will be allowed for comments to be received. At the end of this period, the Museum will consider the comments before a final decision on the exchange is made.

### **Disposal by Destruction**

10.16 If it is not possible to transfer an object by gift, sale or exchange, the governing body may decide to destroy it.

10.17 It is acceptable to destroy material of low intrinsic significance (duplicate mass-produced articles or common specimens which lack significant provenance) where no alternative method of disposal can be found.

10.18 Destruction is also an acceptable method of disposal in cases where an object is in extremely poor condition, has high associated health and safety risks or is part of an approved destructive testing request identified in an organisation's research policy.

10.19 Where necessary, specialist advice will be sought to establish the appropriate method of destruction. Health and safety risk assessments will be carried out by trained staff where required.

10.20 The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the museum workforce. In circumstances where this is not possible, e.g., the destruction of controlled substances, suitable third-party certification should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.

### **Authorisation**

10.21 Authorisation for the disposal of an object is required through the Collections Development Committee and is as follows:

- a) For an object valued up to £24,999, via Head of Collections and Research
- b) For an object whose value lies between £25,000 and £249,999, via Director of Content and Programmes
- c) For an object whose value lies between £250,000 and £499,999 via Chief Executive
- d) For an object whose value lies at £500,000 or more, via the Board of Trustees
- e) Any novel or contentious object, regardless of value, will be referred to the Board of Trustees for their approval.

Any member of staff with approval status shall be a permanent appointment.

## **11. Documenting acquisition, transfer and disposal**

11.1 Acquisition, transfer and disposal decisions will be confirmed in writing by the Acquisitions and Transfers Group and the Collections Development Committee, where advice on potential acquisitions will also be given.

11.2 Extraordinary meetings of the Collections Development Committee may be called outside the usual schedule to discuss urgent or special cases.

11.3 Acquisitions and disposals will be reported to the Board of Trustees for information.

11.4 Full details of funds raised through disposal by sale of any objects from the Collection will be reported to the SLT, Board of Trustees and published in the annual accounts. The Museum Registrar will maintain an up-to-date list of acquisitions, transfers and disposals, including valuations.

11.5 Advice from the Museums Association Ethics Committee will be sought at the earliest opportunity regarding any transfers or disposals which may be contentious in the public domain and involve potential sales.

## **12. Human remains**

12.1 Where the Museum identifies human remains in its collection it will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005.

12.2 The Museum holds, and may acquire, material from military crash sites. When considering the acquisition of such material the Museum will observe the requirement of paragraph 10.1 above, and also ensure that the material has been obtained with



an appropriate licence according to the terms of the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986.

### **13. Biological and geological material**

13.1 So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the Museum will not acquire by any direct or indirect means any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law or treaty of the United Kingdom or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

### **14. Archaeological material**

14.1 The Museum will not acquire archaeological material in any case where the Board or Staff have any suspicion that the circumstances of recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.

14.2 In England, Northern Ireland and Wales the procedures include reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure (i.e., the Coroner for Treasure) as set out in the Treasure Act 1996 (as amended by the Coroners & Justice Act 2009).

### **15. Exceptions**

15.1 Any exceptions to the above collecting clauses will only be because the Museum is:

- acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
- acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin.

In these cases, the Museum will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

### **16. Spoliation**

16.1 The Museum will use 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions', issued by the National Museum Directors' Conference in 1998, and report on them in accordance with the guidelines.

### **17. The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains**

17.1 The Museum's Trustees, acting on the advice of the Museum's professional staff, may take a decision to return human remains (unless covered by the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005), objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The Museum will take such decisions on a case-by-case basis within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance.

17.2 Any requests for restitution and repatriation of accessioned objects should be made in writing to the Director of Content and Programmes. Research will be undertaken by the Head of Collections and Research and/or Head of Collections Services and relevant staff to ascertain the possibility of restitution with due consideration to legal and ethical issues. In many cases this will involve the

appropriate expert advice from relevant communities, the Ministry of Defence, Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and colleagues in other Museums. All relevant correspondence and documentation will be stored on the Museum's shared drive. Requests will be presented to the Collections Development Committee for discussion, who will then make the relevant recommendation to the Trustees of the Royal Air Force Museum for approval.

17.3 Where the restitution of objects is agreed, the Museum will follow the collection disposals procedures sensitively. Any restitution of human remains will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums'.

Any comments concerning the contents of this document are to be addressed in writing to the Department of Collections and Research via:

E: [askcollections@rafmuseum.org](mailto:askcollections@rafmuseum.org)

Department of Collections and Research  
Royal Air Force Museum  
Grahame Park Way  
London. NW9 5LL